

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9172

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN

AMEMBASSY KINGSTON

AMEMBASSY MEXICO

AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 6376

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TD, VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELAN REACTION TO PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS'
ATTACKS

REF: PORT OF SPAIN 1463

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT IS REACTING CAUTIOUSLY TO CHARGES BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO THAT VENEZUELA HAS COLONIAL DESIGNS ON ITS CARIBBEAN NEIGHBORS. VENEZUELA IS LIKELY TO TREAT PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS AND HIS ACCUSATIONS WITH TACT, BUT WILL NOT CURTAIL ITS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS IN THE CARIBBEAN TO PLACATE THE PRIME MINISTER. END SUMMARY.

2. IN RESPONSE TO NUMEROUS PRESS QUERIES ABOUT VENEZUELA'S REACTION TO PRIME MINISTER ERIC WILLIAMS' ACCUSATIONS, FOREIGN MINISTER RAMON ESCOVAR SALOM HAS REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT VENEZUELA HAS ANY COLONIAL AMBITIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN. ESCOVAR HAS ALSO DENIED ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS THAT VENEZUELA ASPIRES TO
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ANY LEADERSHIP ROLE IN LATIN AMERICA AS A WHOLE. FOLLOWING

THE JUNE 17 VENEZUELAN CABINET MEETING, ESCOVAR TOLD THE PRESS THAT ONLY AFTER THE VENEZUELAN FOREIGN MINISTRY COMPLETES ITS CURRENT ANALYSIS OF WILLIAMS' MOST RECENT STATEMENTS WILL VENEZUELA RESPOND TO THE GOTT. ESCOVAR NOTED, HOWEVER, THE "UNSHAKABLE FACT" THAT, CONTRARY TO DR. WILLIAMS, VENEZUELA IS A NATION OF THE CARIBBEAN WITH TWO THOUSAND KILOMETERS OF CARIBBEAN COASTLINE AND TRADITIONAL TIES TO CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES WHICH PREDATE ITS EMERGENCE AS AN OIL PRODUCER.

3. COMMENT: OUR ASSESSMENT AT THIS STATE IS THAT ESCOVAR AND OTHER VENEZUELAN OFFICIALS, WHO ARE UNACCUSTOMED TO BEING ON THE RECEIVING END OF ACCUSATIONS OF IMPERIALISM, WILL RESPOND CAUTIOUSLY AND TACTFULLY TO WILLIAMS' CHARGES AND WILL TRY TO AVOID ANY PUBLIC POSTURE WHICH WOULD APPEAR TO GIVE SUBSTANCE TO THOSE CHARGES. THEY WILL CONTINUE TO DENY THAT VENEZUELA HAS COLONIAL AMBITIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN, WHILE SEEKING TO AVERT AN OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH WILLIAMS. THE GOV WILL ALSO TRY TO STAY OUT OF QUARRELS BETWEEN JAMAICA AND TRINIDAD AND TO SOFTEN UP THE LATTER. FOR EXAMPLE, ESCOVAR ANNOUNCED ON JUNE 14 THAT VENEZUELA IS INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING COOPERATION IN THE FISHERIES INDUSTRY WITH TRINIDAD AND WANTS TO ACTIVATE THE VENEZUELAN-TRINIDADIAN MIXED COMMISSION.

4. PRIVATELY, GOV OFFICIALS SEEM PUZZLED BY WILLIAMS' ONSLAUGHT, OR INCLINED TO PASS IT OFF AS MERELY A REFLECTION OF HIS NOTABLE ECCENTRICITY. THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE MUCH APPRECIATION HERE AS YET OF THE FACT THAT THE ROOT PROBLEM LIES IN THE VENEZUELAN-JAMAICAN COURTSHIP AND WILLIAMS' LONG MEMORY OF PERFIDY IN KINGSTON. FROM ALL INDICATIONS, THE GOV IS QUITE TAKEN WITH MANLEY, AND FOREIGN MINISTER ESCOVAR SALOM HAS EVEN BEEN HEARD TO EXPRESS WARM ADMIRATION FOR DUDLEY THOMPSON. THUS, THE INTEREST HERE IN PURSUING BILATERAL PROJECTS WITH JAMAICA (IF THE COST IS NOT TOO GREAT) WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE, HOWEVER, WILLIAMS MAY REACT.

5. THERE IS ONE AREA WHERE THE WILLIAMS OFFENSIVE MAY HAVE REAL IMPACT. CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ HAS NOT YET GIVEN UP ON SOME KING OF CARIBBEAN MEETING AS THE FINAL PRELUDE TO HIS GRAND HEMISPHERE CONFERENCE AT THE SUMMIT NEXT FALL. (THE FOREIGN MINISTRY SAYS A CARIBBEAN CHIEFS-OF-STATE CONCLAVE IS STILL IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE PLANNING STAGE; BUT THE JAMAICAN AMBASSADOR HERE MAINTAINS THAT PEREZ AND MANLEY AGREED TO SUBSTITUTE A MEETING OF THE AREA'S FOREIGN MINISTERS IN BRIDGETOWN.) IT IS HARD TO SEE FROM HERE HOW ANY SCHEME OF THIS KIND CAN PROSPER UNLESS WILLIAMS RELENTS--AND HE IS NOT KNOWN AS A MAN OVERLY GIVEN TO SECOND THOUGHTS.

6. WITH RESPECT TO CARACAS PRESS REPORTS BEING REPRINTED IN

TRINIDAD (PORT OF SPAIN 1501) THE SERIOUS MEDIA HERE HAVE
IGNORED THE NATION THAT PRIME MINISTER WILLIAMS' CHARGES AGAINST
VENEZUELA ARE SOMEHOW ROOTED IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONSPIRACY
INSPIRED BY THE MULTINATIONALS. THE SENSATIONALIST DAILY EL MUNDA
DID REPORT ON JUNE 18 THAT THE FOREIGN POLICY COMMITTEE OF THE
CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES WOULD BEGIN AN INVESTIGATION TO DETERMINE
WHETHER SUCH A CONSPIRACY EXISTED. HOWEVER, THE CHAIRMAN
OF THE COMMITTEE, COPEI DEPUTY JOSE RODRIGUEZ ITURBE, TOLD AN
EMBASSY OFFICER ON JUNE 20 THAT THE STORY HAD "ABSOLUTELY NO
FOUNDATION" AND THAT HIS COMMITTEE WAS NOT CONTEMPLATING SUCH
AN INVESTIGATION.
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